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WASHINGTON -- At least a dozen former members of Congress have felony convictions on their records but are still receiving taxpayer-funded pensions, and the House thinks that's a crime.

On Tuesday, it voted unanimously to strip future lawbreakers of their public retirement benefits upon conviction of official wrongdoing, including bribery and conspiring with foreign interests. Now, only a conviction of a crime such as treason or espionage requires forfeiture of a congressional pension, which means lawmakers with other serious offenses on their rap sheets continue to draw benefits.

The Senate last week passed a similar measure disqualifying lawmakers convicted of official misconduct, bribery or related perjury, and the two chambers will now try to work out their differences on the matter.

"We have several hundred thousand dollars paid out of the treasury every year to convicted former members of Congress," said Rep. Mark Kirk (Ill.), who has been pushing for a more sweeping version of the change for years. "These are public officials who were indicted, convicted and then lost all of their appeals. I think it's indefensible."

Former Rep. Bob Ney (Ohio), sentenced last week to serve 30 months in prison for his role in a recent federal bribery investigation, could qualify for a full pension of \$29,000 by one estimate of the National Taxpayers Union, a watchdog group also pushing for changes. His pension would not be affected even if the legislation eventually becomes law.

The measure passed Tuesday would require forfeiture of the pension benefit for conviction of such offenses as bribing public officials and witnesses and wrongfully acting as agents of foreign principals. Perjury in investigations of those crimes would also require forfeiture.

"In the past few years, America's faith in Congress has been undermined by scandal after scandal," said Rep. Nancy Boyda (Kan.), sponsor of the House measure. "I find it absurd that the politicians behind those scandals are still eligible for congressional pensions. ... This bill is a major step toward restoring the public trust in Congress."

But Kirk thinks the list of crimes should be much longer, and include everything from tax evasion and wire fraud to intimidation of contributors and racketeering.

"We've had over a dozen members of Congress convicted of felonies, many of them for felonies not on the short list," Kirk said. "I think it's unfortunate if we pass reforms to cancel the pension but don't do it right."

Congress has considered similar pension changes in the past, although the House and Senate have never agreed on such a crackdown.

Supporters say they hope the change will become law this time, as Democratic leaders are making ethics reform one of their priorities in the new Congress...

..."Congressional pensions are already more generous than those given to rank-and-file federal workers, not to mention those in the private sector," said Pete Sepp, a spokesman for the National Taxpayers Union. "If Congress can't get around to reforming the system, the least they can do is make sure that taxpayers don't subsidize criminals."